

Stories inside

Church connects with
neighbors - p. 5

Four women engage in
Benedictine life - p. 7

Pastor joins other clergy in
Minneapolis - p. 13

Programs are rooted in
welcome - p. 16

CALENDAR ON PAGE 15
FEATURES 70+ EVENTS



Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest
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‘God’s kingdom is something we live’

Preaching for the Sunday, Jan. 18, Martin Luther King Jr. Day worship service at Holy Temple Church of God in Christ in Spokane, the Rev. Benjamin Watson Sr. reminded those gathered by the Spokane Minister’s Fellowship that they gathered “not simply to remember a man but to remember a movement, a movement rooted in the Kingdom of God.”

They were not gathered to honor a holiday but to honor a holy calling.

“We gather to remember a man, yes, but more important to remember the Kingdom that shaped him,” said Benjamin, pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and executive director of Emmanuel Family Life Center.

“Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not begin with marches or microphones. He began with a Kingdom conviction. Before he stood before presidents, he knelt before the King of Kings. Before he spoke to the nation, he listened to the voice of God. Before he dreamed of a better world, he surrendered to a better Kingdom.”

Benjamin pointed out that Dr. King’s life teaches what Jesus



Pastor Benjamin Watson preaches for Spokane Ministers Fellowship Service.

taught, that “the Kingdom of God is not just something we wait for, it’s something we live.”

When people live the Kingdom, seek the King and surrender to his reign, they discover that “there’s a King in you.”

In Luke 17:20-21, Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is within you.”

“It’s not around us, not some day, not after we die, but within us,” Benjamin affirmed.

For him, that means Kingdom courage, compassion, justice, dignity and purpose are within each person.

“Dr. King believed, preached and embodied this. He understood that the Kingdom is God’s reign breaking into human reality through human vessels,” Benjamin continued. “That’s why he could stand against hatred without becoming hateful, face violence without surrendering to violence and love his enemies without losing his identity.”

Dr. King said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that,” because he knew that “the King lives in me.”

“When we seek the Kingdom as Dr. King did, we seek justice,”

Continued on page 4

Domestic violence survivor works to help other victims find healing

By Marijke Fakasiieiki

A plaque hanging over the desk of Taffy Hunter in her office at Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition (SRDVC)/End the Violence shares words from Isaiah: “We are called to break the chains of those who are in prison and set free the captives.”

As a reminder that she was once captive and set free, it has hung in other offices where she has served. She is now called to serve those who are captive and

to move them to the joy of release from bondage to violence.

Taffy, who has been executive director since April 2024, previously worked with the SRDVC, bringing skills from her education and her commitment as a survivor of domestic violence.

“Because I was that captive, I have the skills to help others escape captivity with compassion, care and humility,” she said.

“My favorite color isn’t green!” was what she yelled out the window when driving

away, fleeing with her children, because during her 15-year marriage, her husband assumed her favorite color was green.

“One of my first acts of agency was to say that. I then searched for what my favorite color was and realized I love all the colors, so I’m often dressed like a rainbow,” she said.

After gaining the courage to leave an abusive marriage, she returned to school and began to learn about abuse and domestic violence.

Taffy earned an associate of arts degree in early childhood education from Lethbridge Polytechnic in Canada, a human services degree with a focus in domestic violence at Walden University in Minneapolis, Minn., and later a master’s degree in human services with a focus on nonprofit leadership from Touro Worldwide University, a Jewish-sponsored university in Los Angeles.

“Being a survivor and a violence preventionist, I created a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workplace for my

Continued on page 6

Persist Together: Inspire Miracles is theme for 2026 Spring Benefit

The 2026 Spring Benefit speakers will frame their comments around how The Fig Tree story and resource sharing reflect the theme, “Persist Together: Inspire Miracles.”

The Fig Tree is recruiting people to host tables of eight guests for the Benefit Lunch from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, March 14, in the Hemmingson Ballroom at Gonzaga University. The program will be from noon to 1 p.m.

Speakers for the annual fundraiser are David Gortner, pastor at St. Luke’s Lutheran in Coeur d’Alene and a Fig Tree Board member; LaRae Wiley, founder and elder at the Spokane Salish School; Luc Jasmin III, Eastern Washington representative of the Governor’s office, and Laurel Fish, organizer with the Spokane Alliance, sharing how their efforts intersect with The Fig Tree.

Hamilton Studio is preparing a promotional video featuring eight community leaders and Fig Tree supporters: Jeff Ferguson, Jennifer Compau, Rusty Nelson, Betsy Wilkerson, Jillian Joseph, Andre Dove, Rob McCann, Pat Castaneda and Katie Thompson. Hamilton Studio will include video clips from the Eastern Washington Legislative Conference in the background.

The livestream from the Benefit Lunch and the promotional video will be shared for the Breakfast-time Benefit from 7:30 to 9 a.m., Wednesday, March 18, on Zoom.

The events are the major fundraisers for supporting The Fig Tree’s monthly newspaper and the annual Resource Directory.

“We have 45 tables to fill and already have 25 hosts. Last year the compelling presentations shared all year helped us raise more than previous years from sponsors, with more than \$73,500 in the spring, fall and year end,” said Mary Stamp, editor. “It’s crucial to raise \$78,000 this year.”

To attend, call 535-1813 or visit thefigtree.org/donate.html.

Religion News Briefs
Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111
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Thousands join faith-based calls for action

Calls for justice are on a crescendo—from more than 650 pastors who stood in solidarity with the community of Minneapolis, Minn., to more than 8,000 faith leaders who gathered online on Jan. 25 for a prayer organized by the Faith in Action Network, to peaceful protests in communities growing in cities and towns across the U.S. As violence escalates in areas where U.S. federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol agents have been deployed, religious leaders step up their calls for human rights, dignity and nonviolence.

As Faith in Action Network executive director Bishop Dwayne Royster said in the online gathering: “We are gathered because blood has been shed, and that blood demands our time.” Representing many faiths, those on the call agreed prayer must be accompanied by action. “You carry moral authority,” he said. “This is not a time for performative faith.”

Marianne Edgar Budde, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C., said: “We are grieved by what is happening in our country, with our eyes and ears focused on Minnesota and yet acutely aware that what is happening there is also happening in neighborhoods and towns across our land.”

Everett Kelley, national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said Alex Pretti, who was killed by federal agents on Jan. 24, was a federation member. “When a worker is killed by the state, this is not just a tragedy, this is a moral failure,” he said. “Federal workers are not expendable.”

Minister JaNae Bates Imari, co-director for ISAIAH, a multi-racial, multi-faith, nonpartisan coalition of state faith communities, noted that Minneapolis saw 75,000 people pour into streets on the year’s coldest day: “We are facing an existential crisis not just about our democracy but about who we are.”

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, CEO of T’ruah in New York, offered a prayer of lament. “How long will armed troops roam our streets terrorizing, kidnapping and murdering our neighbors?” she asked. “Grant compassion to our weary hearts that we may continue to care for each other and for ourselves.”

Buddhist meditation teacher Hugh Byrne led a meditation for grief and suffering. “May you be safe. May you be healthy. May you be peaceful. May you be held in loving kindness,” he said.

Carlos Malavé was among pastors who went to Minneapolis. “We experienced people living in terror,” he said. “People are not working or going anywhere unless absolutely necessary. Imagine a five-year-old abducted and sent to Texas!”

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, N.J., said putting faith in action means saying no. “We mourn for a world, a country that allows five-year-olds to be kidnapped and protestors to be slaughtered,” he said. “How will you say no? How will you say no to violence?”

Bishop Francine Brookins of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, said to imagine living with the fear gripping Minneapolis. “Imagine that, within an hour, somebody could knock at your door,” she said. “Your child could be left alone, freezing in a car.”

Jamie Beran, CEO of Bend the Arc Jewish Action, said, “May this country know the courage of radical, holy honesty. There is no one coming to rescue us. We are the only ones to rescue us.”

Haris Tarin, vice president of Policy and Programming for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, prayed for immigrant communities across the U.S. “Strengthen us to confront systems that profit from fear, policies that fracture families and practices that strip people from humanity in the name of law, order and politics. Protect those who protest peacefully. Hold accountable those in power, even if they try to be unaccountable. Make us builders of a future where safety does not come at the cost of dignity.”

Those gathered called for actions: contact policymakers to stop funding ICE, pause ICE activities and have a thorough bipartisan investigation into deaths.

Karen Georgia Thompson, United Church of Christ general minister and president, called for solidarity. “It’s going to take all of us, joined together, to see the change that we need at this time. We will be present until change comes.”

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Advent Lutheran funds Fig Tree, 20 others

The Fig Tree is one of 21 recipients of 2026 Advent Lutheran Church Endowment Fund grants announced on Jan. 23.

This is the 13th year The Fig Tree has received a grant, ranging from \$450 to \$1,130, with this year’s grant being \$750.

The fund was created in the mid-1990s to give the church a way to expand its support of “de-

serving, but underfunded ministries in our own community, nationally or internationally.”

The Endowment Fund supports education and initiatives that promote outreach, growth and services to marginalized people through various ministries.

Programs receiving grants foster spiritual growth, social justice, leadership develop-

ment and creative ministries, not budgeted, operational expenses. Grants range from \$300 to \$5,000.

Applications are due by Dec. 31. Funds are distributed in January. Recipients are asked to report on their use of the funds.

For information, call 928-7733 or email alcspokane@comcast.net.

Contest is on ‘Art of Courage and Resistance’

Friday, March 13, is the deadline for middle and high school students to submit their statements on the prompt “The Art of Courage and Resistance” to the Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust’s 11th Annual Jessica Stein Memorial Student Art Contest. They are to deliver the art pieces by Sunday, March 15.

Held in partnership with the Seattle Holocaust Center for Humanity, the art contest challenges students to explore the history and personal stories of

the Holocaust and to consider how these stories connect to the lives of people today.

For local educators, this is an opportunity to teach the history of the Holocaust, inspire students to confront bigotry and indifference, promote human dignity and take action.

The Spokane art contest is open to students in grades six to 12 from Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho. They may also submit their art to the Seattle contest.

The annual art contest is of-

fered in memory of Jessica Stein who joined the committee in 2010 as a high school student and continued to share her insights and passion for art and education about the Holocaust until her passing in 2022.

Winners of the Spokane contest will be honored at the Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust, which will be held at 7 p.m., Tuesday, April 14, at Temple Beth Shalom.

For information, email SpokaneYHArtContest@gmail.com.

Salish School presents storytelling event

Čaptikwł are the literature, law and scripture of Southern Interior Salish culture, and winter is an important time to share čaptikwł. Traditionally in the wintertime, people were gathered together in their permanent homes after a long season of managing, harvesting and storing their root, fish, berry and game resources throughout their territory.

The short days and long nights of winter provided opportunity for families to teach and entertain with čaptikwł, traditional stories.

Salish School of Spokane presents an evening of Southern Interior Salish storytelling at 7 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 12, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, 4340 W. Whistalks Way.

It will include sharing čaptikwł, traditional creation and Coyote stories, through both traditional and modern means.

Stories will be shared in ɲsəlɣčɪn (Colville Salish) with interpretation to English. There is no charge, but donations are welcome.

For information, visit salish-schoolofspokane/captklm.

Spokane Helpers food pantry moves

After several years of running its food pantry in a private home, Spokane Helpers has moved to its new location in a warehouse with Women Helping Women Fund.

Founded in 2020 as a grassroots nonprofit in response to COVID-related hunger, it has grown over five years as food and housing costs continue to rise. In 2024, the organization’s 165 volunteers delivered more than 15,000 free meals to

food-insecure households across Spokane County.

With no immediate decline in local hunger expected, Spokane Helpers Network recently expanded operations from the private residence to a 1,500-square-foot warehouse in North Spokane.

“The larger facility allows the organization to store food and prepare deliveries more efficiently, increasing our ability to serve households that cannot

afford groceries and face barriers to accessing traditional food sources such as food banks,” said Susan Osborn, executive director.

She also envisions the new space as a hub where student clubs and community groups can gather to take action against hunger in Spokane.

For information, call 979-0933, email info@SpokaneHelpersNetwork.org or visit spokanhelpersnetwork.org.

The Fig Tree is published 10 months each year, September through June.

Deadlines:
COPY - 3rd Wednesdays
ADS - 3rd Fridays
It is published by The Fig Tree, 1323 S. Perry St., Spokane, WA 99202, a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization.

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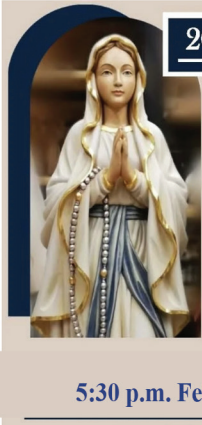
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Ready to end the cycle of family homelessness?



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2026 LOURDES NOVENA FOR HEALING

Tuesday, Feb. 3 - Wednesday, Feb. 11
Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes
1115 W Riverside - Spokane WA

Join us for nine days of prayer & devotions for spiritual, physical, emotional and relational healing

Six speakers, including the
Most Rev. Thomas Daly, Bishop of Spokane
Feb. 9 & 10 - Special Guest Fr. Gary Thomas
will preach on spiritual healing.

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5:30 p.m. Feb. 3-6 and 9-11 • 4 p.m. Feb 7 • 1 p.m. Feb 8

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Seminary hosts weekend for discernment

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) Discernment Weekend will host “Signs Along the Way,” from Friday to Sunday, March 13 to 15, in Berkeley, Calif., for anyone discerning a call to seminary and interested in online education. This is an opportunity to connect with others in discernment, connect with PLTS faculty and explore online studies in the master of divinity, master of arts in spirituality and social change, or Lutheran Year programs. For information, visit plts.edu/signs.

River Forum H2O Breakfast is March 31

Spokane River Forum H2O Breakfast will be held 7:30 to 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, Mar. 31, at CenterPlace, 2426 N. Discovery Place, Spokane Valley. The keynote speaker for this annual event is Lisa Seales of the Deschutes River Conservancy. For information, email happy.avery@spokaneriver.net

Whitman United Way funds senior meals

United Way of Whitman County raised more than \$7,500 on Giving Tuesday, matched by Vision and Values Cornerstone Wealth Strategies, for a total of \$15,000 so Pullman Parks and Recreation can continue senior congregate meals at the Pullman Senior Center, Tuesdays and Fridays for three months. Pullman Parks and Recreation, Aging and Long-Term Care of Eastern Washington (ALTCEW) and other community service providers and partners seek an organization to continue to provide weekly meals at the Pullman Senior Center, including costs for cooks, food, a licensed dietician and administration to work with ALTCEW to fund meals. “Providing meals at the senior center is a priority,” said recreation manager Megan Vining. “We hope to continue working with local groups to provide this service.” “We were excited to mobilize funding, especially with the partnership with Vision and Values, and celebrating the power of collective giving and community-based philanthropy,” said Meg Pannkuk, United Way of Whitman County board member. For information, call 339-4962 or email director@whitmanunited.org.

United Methodist missionary itinerates in area

Deaconess Joy Prim, a United Methodist Church (UMC) missionary in Hong Kong, will itinerate in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) for three weeks in July. Working with the General Board of Global Ministries UMC, she serves as a case worker with the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), a faith-based nonprofit that helps foreign domestic workers facing difficulties and provides resources to empower migrant workers. Joy will speak July 10 to 12 at the annual United Methodist Mission U at Yakima Wesley UMC. She is available to speak in Eastern Washington districts, with small or large church groups from July 14 to 20. Several PNWUMC folks have visited to see Joy’s work in Hong Kong. Other PNW mission team members have presented workshops to resource the Mission for Migrant Workers. For information, email rdcordill@gmail.com or marilyn-seid21@gmail.com.

Feed My Starving Children seeks volunteers

For Feed My Starving Children (FMSC), a hunger relief organization that has provided life-saving meals since 1987 through partners in other countries, volunteers are being recruited to meet April 24 and 25 at Redeemer Lutheran Church, 3606 Schafer Rd., to pack 139,968 MannaPack meals and collect food for Spokane Valley Partners’ food bank. There is a need for 120 volunteers working in five packing shifts. Volunteer registration opens March 2. In 2024-2025, more than 375 million meals were provided to 75 partners in 60 countries. MannaPack meals consist of rice, soy, nutrients and flavoring. Since 2015, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church has hosted FMSC Inland Northwest MobilePack events at Redeemer Lutheran. Volunteers from more than 30 churches, organizations and businesses have helped. They have packed 5,066 meals to send to 1,307,372 meal destinations in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, the Caribbean and the Philippines, said Charles Brondow, MobilePack coordinator. For information, call 994-3016 or email chuckbari41@gmail.com.

Faith Action Network gathers advocates

The Faith Action Network (FAN) of Washington’s Interfaith Advocacy Day (IFAD) gathers people of faith and conscience from around the state on Thursday, Feb. 12, in Olympia to learn about state legislation and meet with legislators. The 2026 session brings budget pressures, the need to protect Washington’s social safety net and opportunities to advance justice in housing, immigrant rights, climate, democracy and progressive revenue. “FAN partners seek to build a Washington rooted in justice and compassion for all,” said Joyce del Rosario, executive director. FAN’s legislative agenda includes calling for thoughtful, progressive revenue to make the

Washington state tax code more stable, sustainable and equitable, stepping away from balancing the budget on the backs of the poor, she said. FAN works to protect food security, housing and the safety net and asks the state to step in where the federal government is failing neighbors. “We urge health equity for immigrant neighbors and outlawing of masking by law enforcement, and seek more worker, data and privacy protections. In 2026, FAN is proposing one bill to enable religious communities to provide low-income housing, and another bill to bar localities from forbidding shelters and transitional housing within their borders.

Joyce urges faith communities to press legislators to preserve full funding for climate commitments and wildfire resilience and support Indigenous representation in decision-making bodies on natural resources. FAN’s full legislative agenda is available online at fanwa.org. On Interfaith Advocacy Day, participants will be able to join plenaries and briefings that will explore issues on FAN’s 2026 legislative agenda, meet with advocates from their legislative districts to prepare for their legislative visits and meet with their legislators or their legislative assistants. To register for IFAD, visit: <https://fanwa.org/interfaith-advocacy-day>.

GU re-launches the Climate Law Clinic

The Gonzaga University School of Law with the Gonzaga Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment re-launched the Environmental & Climate Law Clinic in fall 2025 under co-directors Vanessa Waldref, former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, and Dan Fruchter, former Department of Justice Environmental Crimes coordinator, senior legal fellows at the Climate Institute and law partners at Singleton Schreiber’s Spokane office. “I’m honored to guide the next generation of legal advocates to fight for public health and stronger communities,” said Vanessa. “The clinic is an opportunity to blend our passion for public service with hands-on legal education, empowering students to ensure our region remains a place where everyone can live, work and thrive in a safe, healthy environment.” “The clinic is about legal training and instilling a commitment to justice, service, stewardship and community,” said Dan. “Students will learn how to use the law to protect and strengthen communities in the Inland Northwest.”

It comes at a time of increased need for legal interventions and empowering students to impact communities through public interest litigation, policy development and community advocacy. “The climate crisis is the most pressing issue facing our planet. Using tools of law and policy, the clinic will advance structural changes needed for communities, water and lands to flourish in the face of a rapidly changing climate,” said Brian Henning, founding director of the Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment. “Gonzaga’s School of Law will complement the environmental studies program for undergraduates who may wish to pursue a career in environmental law. The clinic will open opportunities for students and future environmental lawyers,” said Lisa Manning, Gonzaga alumna, who has found financial support for the clinic. Students and faculty will work to defend public health, protect public lands, promote clean air and water and advocate to enforce environmental regulations. They will do research to help legislators draft environmental

legislation and regulations. The clinic will also provide free or low-cost legal representation to individuals, nonprofits and community groups facing environmental challenges related to pollution, land use and resource management. It will partner with local and national environmental non-governmental agencies to address climate change, wildlife conservation and land preservation through advocacy, education and research. For information, email guzmans@gonzaga.edu or visit gonzaga.edu/school-of-law/clinic-centers/law-clinic/environmental-clinic?&.

Meaningful Movies Spokane
Is That Black Enough?
Friday, Feb 13 at 6:30pm
UU Church of Spokane
4340 W Whistalks Wy - FREE

Grief Tending Circle
March 1 - 4-6:30pm
Songs, sharing & somatic release
harmonywoods.org

SAVE the dates • Host a group
2026 Benefit Events



Lunch - Saturday, March 14

Buffet opens 11 a.m. • Program 12-1
Hemmingson Ballroom at Gonzaga University

Breakfast-Time, Wednesday, March 18

Gather 7:30 • Slides 7:50 • Program 8 to 9 a.m. - Zoom
There is no charge to attend. Guests are asked to donate

To RSVP email event@thefigtree.org
secure.givelively.org/donate/the-fig-tree/2026-benefit
CALL 509-535-4112

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Spring 2026 Flannery Lecture
in Catholic Theology

*‘Strangers Still Longer:
Comparative Lessons on Otherness
from a Demon Devotee’*

Dr. Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier

Tuesday, March 3
4:30 to 6 p.m.

Hemmingson Ballroom
Gonzaga University

313-5980
mccurden@gonzaga.edu



Pastor understands that love, not just laws needed to transform hearts

Continued from page 1
he said. “The only message Dr. King preached was about the Kingdom of God. He did not drive out devils. He did not ask if we were born again.”

Benjamin cited Jesus’ call in Matt. 6:33 to “seek first the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness,” clarifying “righteousness is not just personal morality. It’s a right relationship with God, neighbor and community.”

Micah 6:8 says right relationship is doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God.

“Dr. King didn’t pursue justice because it was popular. He pursued justice because it was Kingdom,” he said. “He didn’t march to make a name for himself. He marched because he had already bowed his knee to the Name above every name. He didn’t fight for civil rights because of politics but because of the Gospel.”

He also reminded listeners that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Benjamin quoted: “Blessed are the peacemakers, the merciful, those who love enemies, those who do good to those who do not do good to them. It’s what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters.”

“Dr. King’s activism was not separate from his faith. It was the fruit of his faith. He sought the King, and because he sought the King, he sought the Kingdom, and because he sought the Kingdom, he sought justice.”

Benjamin said, “the Kingdom heals what laws cannot heal.”

2 Chron. 7:14 says there is a

word from the Lord that echoes across generations.

“This is not a verse. It is a formula for national healing, a formula Dr. King understood, because there are some things we cannot legislate,” he said. “Dr. King said that ‘a law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me. I think that’s pretty important.’ Laws can restrain evil, but only the Kingdom can transform the heart.”

“Kingdom understands that we can pass laws, but we can’t legislate love into human lives,” Benjamin said. “We can write resolutions but cannot write healing. We can’t mandate equality without empathy.”

“God says the healing of the land does not begin in Congress or city hall or the courthouse. It begins with my people, not if the politicians would, if the nation would or if the culture would, but if my people would,” Benjamin said.

“If my people call my name, humble themselves, pray and turn from their wicked ways, God will forgive their sins and heal them,” he continued, affirming that it is not just about individuals, but about healing the nation “in our houses, our communities, our state and our nation.”

Dr. King understood this, so before he marched, he prayed. Before he spoke, he listened. Before he confronted injustice, he confronted his own heart before God.

Benjamin pointed out that the Civil Rights Movement was not a political movement, but a spiritual movement.

Dr. King understood that the formula to seek God’s face, Kingdom and healing was not in another law, resolution or program, but in a church that will humble itself, a community praying and hearts turning, so “the Kingdom comes alive in us, because there’s a King in you, and when the King rises, healing follows,” Benjamin said.

“It takes courageous, crazy love,” he said. “When Dr. King taught that ‘love is the most durable power in the world,’ he did not mean sentimental love but Kingdom love, the kind Jesus demonstrated on the cross.”

“Kingdom love,” he explained, “confronts evil without becoming evil, resists injustice without losing joy, speaks truth without losing tenderness and stands firm without becoming hard.”

This love fueled the Civil Rights Movement and made Dr. King a prophet to the nation, Benjamin said, adding, “Dr. King’s life shows what happens when the Kingdom comes alive in a person. He was not perfect but allowed the Kingdom to shape his convictions, compassion, courage and calling.”

“He believed that the Gospel was not just about getting people to heaven, but getting heaven into people,” Benjamin said. “He believed that the church was not just a place to gather but a place to launch Kingdom transformation. That’s why his life speaks to us today. He let God shape his will.”

Benjamin noted that God’s church is often so busy that “when God calls us, we say, ‘Please leave a message.’”

“As Dr. King said, ‘Everybody can be great because anybody can serve,’ because when the Kingdom gets inside a person, when the King sits on the throne of a heart, when Jesus becomes Lord of your life, you become a vessel of change, a light in darkness, a voice of hope, a witness of love, a sign of the Kingdom and proof that there’s a King in you.”

“Oh, what a gift God gave us when he gave us Jesus the Christ and when God gave the nation Dr. King,” said Benjamin, continuing, “When we honor Dr. King, we honor the King he served, the preacher who believed the Gospel could transform a nation, the prophet who believed justice was not a political idea but a Kingdom mandate, the dreamer who believed God’s dream for humanity was bigger than America’s divisions.”

When Dr. King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and declared, “I have a dream,” Benjamin said he wasn’t just giving a speech. He was echoing the heartbeat of the Kingdom, because the Kingdom of God

has always been and is greater than the nation. God’s dream is for humanity.

“Dr. King’s dream was not rooted in politics,” he added. “It was rooted in prophecy, Scripture and the Kingdom. That’s why his dream still speaks. It wasn’t just his dream. It was God’s dream. It was the dream of the Kingdom of God within us.”

“I dream we will be the heartbeat of the Kingdom of God to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” he said. “The dream of God’s church is for rich and poor to stand together.”

“We declare today, we will seek first God’s Kingdom, walk in God’s righteousness, love with God’s love, stand with God’s courage, serve with God’s compassion and shine with God’s light. We will do that because the Kingdom is within us, the King reigns over us, and the King lives through us,” Benjamin said. “There is a king in you and me. Let the glory of the Lord rise in us.”

For information, pbenjamin.eflc@gmail.com.

GU hosts Columbia River film online

A new 35-minute Columbia River film, sharing citizen-led efforts to reform river governance for the international Columbia River watershed is online. The film is from the 2024 Columbia River Transboundary Water and Ethics Symposium.

“Emerging Issues and Public Engagement in the Transboundary Columbia River Basin” held in November 2024 was hosted by the Institute for Climate, Water, and the Environment at Gonzaga University, co-sponsored by the University of British Columbia Okanagan, the Universities Consortium on Columbia River Governance, One River Ethics Matter Project, North American Youth Parliament for Water and Gonzaga’s Climate Institute.

Residents of the international Columbia River Basin gathered to engage in public education

and dialogue on transboundary issues and public involvement in river governance. This meeting built on a 2019 gathering in Kimberley, B.C., and a 2023 virtual Re-engagement Symposium.

More than 160 people gathered to discuss the Agreement in Principle, to reaffirm long term friendships and relationships and to create new synergies and collaborations. Discussions continue with the community of scholars, practitioners, activists

and community members.


Organizers invite citizens of the watershed to view the film to learn about water pollution, returning salmon and resident fisheries, invasive species, the impact of the climate crisis and the need for ethics-based watershed governance tools.

The film is online at gonzaga.edu/climate-institute/events/columbia-river-symposium.

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Ezra 3 Project funds improvements for Emmanuel Presbyterian

By Mary Stamp

Soon after Alyssa Bell began as half-time minister at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in February 2023, the church joined the Ezra 3 Project of the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest (PIN), as part of a multi-year \$800,000 Lilly Endowment Thriving Congregations Initiative grant.

Emmanuel, a 31-member church that considers itself “small but mighty” brought confidence from that belief into participating in an Ezra 3 Project cohort with four other Presbyterian churches of fewer than 50 members. Those churches are Lidgerwood, Spirit Lake, Rear-dan and Korean Presbyterian.

Committed to serving its neighbors in the Emerson Gar-field and West Central neighborhoods and committed to continuing as a church, Emmanuel Presbyterian joined the other small churches in their cohort who share those commitments. They explored how to use \$10,000 seed money from the Ezra Project to make improvements in their building to meet community needs.

They engaged in a study on the theme, “Rooted Good,” to discern ways to steward their spaces for the good of the community, such as finding other people and groups to use their buildings to gain an additional stream of income without losing their identity as a church.

“**We have learned** from each other. Despite differences in our buildings and congregations, we have commonalities. We have talked about what works and what does not work. We have learned that we are not alone and God is working in our places,” said Alyssa.

The process also includes churches meeting with neighbors to help them as a church discover new uses for their properties both to have an impact in their community and to help their churches thrive as they do that.

“**I have been drawn** to love the community and humanity of the local church,” said Alyssa, whose ability to serve half-time and support her family frees her to lead the church to solidify its income so it can continue to be a sacred space and to serve their neighbors.

She also works as a certified spiritual director and as an adjunct instructor at Portland Seminary and Whitworth University. Her husband, Matthew Bell, teaches computer science at Whitworth.

Alyssa’s journey to this ministry began when she grew up in Shadle Park Presbyterian



Alyssa Bell walks with congregation as it explores ways to serve neighbors.

Church two miles north of Emmanuel. She studied theology and music at Whitworth, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in 2005. While serving next as director of music at Mountain View Presbyterian in Marysville, Wash., she confirmed her call to ministry and began seminary at Fuller Northwest Extension at Seattle Pacific University.

In 2009, she started at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, earning a master of divinity degree in 2011 before moving back to Spokane.

Alyssa started as music director at Community Presbyterian in Post Falls and then she and Matthew served as co-associate ministers at Shadle Park and Community Presbyterian. Working part-time, she completed a doctor of ministry in leadership and spiritual formation online with Portland Seminary in 2021.

Those studies not only provided the path to teaching but also give her insights needed in the ministry at Emmanuel Presbyterian.

“**It matters to be** in community in a local church. It’s what we are to be as disciples of Christ,” she said.

For Alyssa, the key strengths of Emmanuel Presbyterian is its mix of theological and political beliefs, and the commitment of members to be a faith community that is journeying together through their lives.

“At Emmanuel, I see people who love each other and take pride in their shared history,” she added.

There were 27 members when Alyssa came and there are now four more, with some joining when Westminster Presbyterian closed in the West Central Spokane neighborhood.

It’s mostly older adults with several middle-aged adults and three children. The oldest mem-

ber is 99.

“In the 1960s it was one of the area’s biggest Presbyterian churches,” she explained. “When I came, they were concerned they might have to close but were committed to staying open. It’s a faithful congregation who give their time and resources.”

Most members once lived in and continue to have roots in the neighborhood, which has a mix of renters and homeowners, but many have moved to other parts of town.

“We discerned about our space and what God had for us by listening to the community and making updates to the building for new uses,” said Alyssa.

For 35 years, the Northwest Parent Co-op Preschool has rented the basement as a long-term, continuing tenant that provides a much-needed service to the community.

In 2024, Emmanuel rented the sanctuary to Christ the King, a church plant from Life Center, which has since moved to a new location. Now Foundation Church, an Open Bible Church, uses the fellowship hall.

“We used part of our funds to make the fellowship hall, which has a spacious stage, more usable for that church and the preschool. We painted the walls and replaced the carpeting,” she said. “We also plan to upgrade the side entrance into the fellowship hall so more people use that entrance rather than going through the sanctuary.

“It’s good to have a dedicated entry to the community space,” Alyssa said.

Foundation Church’s 70 members and children use the fellowship hall for worship at 9:30 a.m. Sundays. Emmanuel’s worship is at 10:30 a.m., while Foundation has their coffee hour. After its service, Foundation has left

said. “Choir practice is often emotionally uplifting. As we practice, the music becomes part of us, so through practice a piece becomes a beautiful song to share.

“The theological impact of music is not just in lyrics but also in how music makes us feel,” she explained.

Alyssa also listed several other ways Emmanuel Presbyterian is active in the neighborhood and world.

- It donates to Our Place neighborhood ministry and has a member on the board.

- Three times a year, it collects gifts for Audubon Elementary School—school supplies in the fall, hats, gloves, leggings and sweatpants in the winter, and gifts to give children at Christmas. Foundation Church now joins in this effort.

- After Westminster Food Bank closed, the church began giving the food it collects to the Caritas Food Bank.

- Emmanuel also connects with national and world outreach through four offerings to the Presbyterian Church (USA): One Great Hour of Sharing for hunger and disaster relief, the Peace and Global Witness offering for peacemaking and reconciliation work, the Pentecost Offering for children and youth at risk, and the Christmas Joy offering to support past, present and future church leaders.

“It helps us feel connected to wider needs,” said Alyssa.

For information, call 326-1252, email office@emmanuelpres-spokane.org or visit emmanuelpres-spokane.org.

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Taffy Hunter outlines how domestic violence coalition has impact

Continued from page 1
team,” she said. “It’s important that our office is a welcoming, safe and productive workplace, because domestic violence work is hard and has a high rate of burnout.”

She believes that if the people who work in the field are understood, safe and supported, they do better.

“I’m passionate about prevention and redirection. I work with our board, my team, community leaders and stakeholders to realign with our mission and vision as the regional domestic violence coalition,” she said.

Knowing that one in three women and one in seven men in Spokane experience violence, they prioritize research on why domestic violence happens and how to prevent it. Prevention includes educating the community with positive norm campaigns, training people through SRDVC’s annual conference, providing a business toolkit and creating community partnerships to strengthen the coalition.

“Prevention lies in breaking down silos in the city, county, neighboring counties and across the state. Because there are many cross-county and cross-state cases, it’s important to coordinate our work by bringing people together,” Taffy said.

Spokane as a region supports, helps, guides, listens to and believes domestic violence survivors and victims, she said, adding that prevention also comes by offering options to help domestic violence perpetrators stop or not start abusing.

Coalition therapists and partners work with those who use violence in relationships to improve communication and relationship skills.

“Domestic violence can be prevented,” she said. “Our goal is to make everyone safer.”



Taffy Hunter helps domestic violence survivors heal.
Photo courtesy of SRDVC

This is the fourth year for a regional domestic violence conference that Taffy first envisioned in August 2021. The SRDVC End the Violence Conference planned for March 17 to 19 offers tracks for law enforcement, judicial members, advocates and youth violence preventionists. One workshop is on interfaith perspectives on domestic violence.

Taffy said the four tracks break down silos between professionals, allowing advocates, law enforcement and courts to share information so they can better serve survivors.

Because SRDVC believes domestic violence is preventable, the track on youth violence prevention is for youth victims and survivors of family, relationship and dating violence.

Taffy also seeks to create spaces where it’s okay—not taboo—for survivors like her to

talk about their experiences.

Throughout the year and for domestic violence awareness month in October, the SRDVC creates accessible spaces where it is safe and accepted to talk about domestic violence in general conversations about support and about resources to help people learn about workplace and dating violence.

Taffy offered some examples.

- SRDVC’s youth violence preventionist provides healthy relationships classes in schools and community centers.

- SRDVC has a positive community norms campaign using feedback from a community survey on prevention related to particular communities.

- Through Court Watch, SRDVC works with law enforcement on firearms relinquishment to reduce the risk of death when someone who is violent in a relationship has access to a firearm.

- SRDVC’s crisis advocate works with self-help legal centers launched in December in rural communities, so people don’t have to drive to the city to file a domestic violence protection order.

- **SRDVC collaborates** with a regional multidisciplinary fatality review board with eight professionals to determine what intervention might have prevented homicides in the region.

- **SRDVC helped** the Department of Corrections develop an online map for people coming out of detention, prison or jail to connect them with resources to reduce recidivism.

- **SRDVC provides** an impact empathy panel for people going through court-ordered or mandated treatment for abuse and domestic violence, where survivors share their stories to create empathy.

- **SRDVC’s Handle with Care** is a pilot program with schools and NEW ESD 101 in Eastern Washington. When a child is at the scene of a traumatic incident—domestic violence, a heart attack, a drug overdose—law enforcement notifies their school without specifics to “handle the child with care.”

They train law enforcement, teachers and administrators to provide a trauma-appropriate response to children when they come to school the next day—offering breakfast so they aren’t hungry, putting off a test or letting them nap in the counselor’s office.

“These measures reduce the trauma and prevent them from acting out,” Taffy said.

“In addition to such care, self-care is important in a survivor’s journey and is specific to each person,” she said. “Part of a survivor’s healing journey is discovering who they are because they lost their personhood. Figuring out who they are, what’s important to them and what they enjoy is vital.”

For Taffy, healing came in realizing she loves spending time with her children and learning about domestic violence and biblical languages. She also finds joy in raising ducks, naps, bubble baths and good food.

“The fun of coming out of abuse is to discover what we love,” she said.

Taffy added that SRDVC is prioritizing working with faith communities to help them recognize, respond and refer victims and survivors.

“We want faith communities to show up for victims and survivors and to support families experiencing abuse,” Taffy said. “We have resources to share a biblical approach to understanding domestic violence. We encourage those in any faith community to be aware that every third woman may be experiencing domestic violence.”

SRDVC wants to help faith communities create safety, so victims can come forward to find support and healing.

For information, visit endtheviolence.org.

Innovia Summit builds trust, community

Innovia Foundation is holding its annual Community Leadership Summit for the community members, nonprofits and change makers on March 16 and 17 at the Spokane Convention Center on the theme “Building Trust, Building Community.”

The organizers seek to spark conversation on how trust is the cornerstone for collective action and lasting community impact.

Participants from 20 counties will hear national and local speakers, join interactive learning sessions and strengthen new and existing relationships based on community wellbeing.

The keynote speakers are Maryam Banikarim and John Noltner. Maryam is the host of The Messy Parts Podcast, co-founder of The Longest Table

and chair of the Wall Street Journal Leadership Institute’s Chief Marketing Officers Council. She will share on The Longest Table, a national movement that began as a small outdoor gathering of eight neighbors during COVID.

John is founder and executive director of A Peace of My Mind, a multimedia arts project, using portraits and personal stories to bridge divides and build community across the U.S. He will host an interactive exhibit for summit attendees to contribute their stories to his project.

“Innovia brings community members together to make more possible throughout 2026,” says Shelly O’Quinn, CEO of Innovia Foundation. “The summit is an opportunity to share stories, create connections, strengthen rela-

tionships and build trust locally.”

Innovia is the community foundation for Eastern Washington and North Idaho, partnering to develop opportunities to help people in need and invite generosity so communities thrive.

For information, visit innovia.org/summit.

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Four women turn their retirement years to Benedictine community

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

Benedictine life in a monastery began in the sixth century and has continued ever since.

In the unlikely setting of the Benedictine Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho, a new thing is happening.

Edrea Eisenhauer, Jeannette Kelley, Chris Roberts and inquirer Mary Litch, all women in their retirement years, are responding to a call to live Benedictine monastic life in the Koinonia of St. Gertrude. Koinonia is Greek for “community.”

“They are doing the hard work of making community, of making the vision of a new version of Benedictine life tangible. They are wonderful women and doing a fantastic job,” said Benedictine prioress Sister Teresa Jackson, who mentors them.

The vision for the Koinonia originated in 2017 when an employee in the monastery saw a short video clip from the United Kingdom on “OWCH” – Older Women Co-Housing. It was not about renting a space but about co-housing: forming an intentional, self-governing, cooperative community where residents live in private homes often clustered around shared space.

This sparked the imagination of the Benedictine Sisters at St. Gertrude’s. They had space because of decreased vocations. They wanted to have it used but they didn’t want an ordinary rental situation. Instead, they wanted to have it fit into the life of the monastery.

“What followed this initial spark were months of meetings, discussions, looking at alternatives, trying out ideas to see what worked and what didn’t,” Teresa explained. “In the last couple of years, the idea took shape and, finally in 2023, the Koinonia became a reality.”

Women who would like to explore this form of community desire to live as an intentional community following the Benedictine way of life need to be physically independent and free from financial or family responsibilities that could restrict them. However, there is no requirement that the person be Catholic and, in fact, one of the four comes from the Quaker tradition.

The women follow the schedule of the Benedictine Sisters, joining them in prayer, meals, work and recreation, deepening their relationship with God through Benedictine spirituality but at the same time forming their own community within the monastery.

They start their journey by visiting the monastery, perhaps making a retreat. Then, if they decide to continue and explore the option more deeply, they arrange to reside in the monastery for a longer period of time—perhaps



Jeannette Kelley, Chris Roberts, Edrea Eisenhauer and Mary Litch
Photo courtesy of Monastery of St. Gertrude

several weeks or a month at a time. Next, they become inquirers and live there for perhaps a year. After that time, if they wish to become a member of the community, they will make a commitment and formally become a member of the community.

Each of the four women currently forming the community has come along a different path.

Two of the women, Edrea and Chris, had been members of the Monastery of St. Gertrude when they were young women and left for personal reasons. Over the years, they had come to the monastery for retreats, volunteering and visits.

Prior to joining Koinonia, Edrea was a teacher for 30 years and then was a financial planner until she retired.

“I had very close ties to some of the sisters who were my friends, and it was always in the back of my mind that after I retired, I would come back and volunteer for the community,” said Edrea, explaining her situation.

She reflects that one element of Benedictine spirituality is having a life that is a balance of work and prayer.

“I find life here gives me the opportunity to experience the contemplative side of me. I am able to live out Benedictine values and give back to this community, which has enriched my life over several decades,” she said.

As part of her work at the mon-

astery, Edrea provides hospitality for those who come as guests and retreatants. She also volunteers at the Cottonwood food bank.

Chris also entered the community in her late teens at the end of the second Vatican Council, a period of great change in the Catholic Church. She left St. Gertrude’s shortly after the Council ended, married and worked as a nurse for 40 years.

In 2017, her husband passed away and she began to think of a second chance at living a Benedictine life. When she learned of the creation of the Koinonia of St. Gertrude, she took that chance and began her inquiry in October 2022. Then in October 2024 she finished her year as an affiliate and made her commitment to the Koinonia.

When first at the monastery, she had been interested in helping with the liturgical environment. Now her life has come full circle from her parish experience as sacristan, in that last spring she took on the role of sacristan at the monastery.

Jeannette and Mary have never been Benedictine sisters, although Jeannette and her husband, Fred, were closely associated with the Monastery of St. Gertrude for many years.

Before their marriage, they were introduced to the Catholic Church in Lewiston by two sisters from St. Gertrude’s. They both became Catholic in the 1980s. Both Jeannette and her

husband were attracted to the Benedictine way of life and community and became leaders of the Oblates of the Monastery of St. Gertrude.

The Oblates consist of nine local communities of lay women and men strongly committed to living and being formed in Benedictine life. Unlike Koinonia, that program has no residential component.

After Jeannette retired from her work with developmentally disabled adults in 2006, the Kelleys moved to Cottonwood to be permanent volunteers at the monastery. At that time, Jeannette became the co-coordinator of the oblates with Teresa and has continued in that role for 14 years.

When her husband became seriously ill, Fred and Jeannette discussed her becoming more closely involved with the Koinonia after his death.

When he passed in November 2024, Jeannette started the process of becoming a member of the Koinonia.

Jeannette describes her experience in making the transition.

“When I sold my house and divested, I felt a great freedom,” she said. “At the monastery, I feel a great freedom, even though the life is structured here. I find joy in the challenges, and they help me to grow.”

Mary’s story differs. She is an inquirer and is exploring the option of requesting membership in the Koinonia. During her time of inquiry, she resides there. She has been there for several months and, like the others, participates in the life of the community.

She comes from a Quaker

tradition and is not Catholic, although she laughingly calls herself a “Quatholic,” as she is immersing herself in the Benedictine tradition as it is practiced at the monastery.

In the past, she was a college philosophy professor who taught in a variety of places but today is deepening her relationship with God in the Benedictine structure in which the day is punctuated by moments of prayer.

In time, if she desires, she will apply to become an affiliate for a year and then make an indefinite commitment to the Koinonia. She may also find that this way of life is not a good fit for her but for the moment is content to explore the possibilities.

In short, this new community represents the continuity of a residential Benedictine presence at the monastery.

It is pioneering a new way for women of all Christian denominations to live a Benedictine monastic life outside the traditional requirements of Roman Catholic religious life.

The Koinonia of St. Gertrude gives women the chance to create a new form of monastic community in the midst of an existing women’s monastery. Its members make an indefinite commitment to live monastic life, engage in initial and on-going formation and fully participate in monastic life with the sisters.

For the women who are there now, it brings them closer to God in the context of community.

For information, email tjackson@stgertrudes.org or visit stgertrudes.org/koinoniaofstgertrude.



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Stephy Nobles Beans rouses MLK rally

“Keep your eyes on the prize, keep your eyes on the prize, keep your eyes on the prize, hold on. Keep your eyes on the prize, keep your eyes on the prize, hold on,” sang Stephy Nobles Beans, author, speaker and life coach, opening her comments at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day rally Jan. 19 in Spokane.

“So this is the moment that we stop treating Dr. King like a memory and start treating him like a mission,” she said, challenging attendees that as they left, they need to “remember unity is how we stand start, vision is how we show up, and justice is how we move forward.

“If we do this today, if we truly commit ourselves, years from now people won’t just say we hosted a Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration. They’ll say we became the kind of community that the late Spokane civil rights leaders Ivan Bush and Happy Watkins dreamed of.”

Stephy asked those who came to the rally and march to carry with them the realization: “When you think of vision, be the bridge, when you see the need, be the help, and when you see the injustice, be the voice.

“Let this holiday be a spark,” she invited. “Let it light something in us that does not fade when the day is over, because the dream is not finished. The work is not complete, and the call is still on us.

“If you believe we are called to unity, say, ‘We are called,’” she said, holding her hand up to hear the people repeat the words.

Stephy also called for their response: “If you believe we are called to serve, say, ‘We will



Stephy Nobles Beans sings “Keep your eyes on the prize.”

serve.’ If you believe we are called to justice then say, ‘We will fight injustice.’

“Then let us leave this place with our heads high, our hearts open and our hands ready. Unity, service, justice! This is our charge. This is our commitment and this is how we honor the King, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., because he says: Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

Keep your eyes on the prize, keep your eyes on the prize, keep your eyes on the prize, hold on,” Stephy sang.

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Women form Idaho for All to honor diversity and challenge hate

By Kaye Hult

In response to the racist comments directed at members of a University of Utah women’s basketball team staying at a Coeur d’Alene hotel in March 2024, a group of local women on Facebook began discussing their concerns about what had happened.

They invited others to an April gathering to answer the question: How can we respond to this?

That first meeting, convened by Lauren McCroskey, brought together around 20 women. They sought to create an event that would honor diversity and those who had been harmed by racism and bigotry.

The women chose to do a Juneteenth Walk on June 19 to commemorate the date enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned of their freedom two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. About 100 people came together to walk downtown in Coeur d’Alene, Lauren said.

The group continued to meet monthly, growing by word-of-mouth. Now composed of men and women, participants come from such organizations as Democrats and Republicans Together, the North Idaho Pride Alliance and NAACP, she said. They also hope to attract people from health-based organizations.

The group is seeking other ways to defend against and protest a small, but motivated element in North Idaho wanting to make Idaho into a Christian nationalist stronghold.

They chose the name Idaho for ALL. Aware of several groups with similar mission, hopes and goals, she said, “Idaho for ALL began focusing on the systemic problems endemic to the area and to promote equity, fairness and racial justice.”

According to the organization’s mission statement, “Those who intimidate citizens and visitors cannot be allowed to harm our communities. This hatred misrepresents the good, welcoming people of North Idaho.

“Working in partnership with other organizations, Idaho for ALL is a coalition of concerned citizens that supports the freedom, safety, health and dignity of all people, regardless of race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality or identity.”

For Juneteenth 2025, they put together a second walk. They again walked through downtown Coeur d’Alene, this time drawing onlookers who joined in vigorous chanting. The walk ended with music by a local artist.

They see their immediate tasks, such as the Juneteenth walks, as being defensive, said



Lauren McCroskey gathers organization of women and men.

Lauren. They have been protesting through that and other events.

Proactively, they show up to support events of other groups in ways that are not adversarial or confrontational. The goal is to build up support for those who are marginalized and neglected.

In December, they held a Vigil for Peace to lift up victims of recent and previous gun violence as a way to remember these people and give those participating space to acknowledge how these happenings affect them, said Lauren.

Other peace vigils may be held for immigrant neighbors or to promote environmental concerns, fair housing or women’s health issues, she continued.

“We hope our vigils will help gather community around issues that everyone cares about, regardless of their political affiliation,” Lauren said.

The group will begin planning in March for the upcoming Juneteenth Walk, now an annual event for them.

In addition, Idaho for ALL is a consortium, acting as an organizing partner for the Idaho Healthy Communities Challenge, the leadership of which comes from Boise State University.

“This is a youth-focused initiative using a health-prevention model,” she explained. “In other words, we hope to tackle a problem before it becomes one.

“Our overriding goal is to help young people develop projects of their choosing to provide alternatives to compete with forces that radicalize them,” she continued.

Idaho for ALL has recruited a

youth facilitator to help attract Kootenai County youth to discuss what they are experiencing that invites them to radicalization. The youth will identify projects that are social or recreational, attractive to their peers, and that they are willing to own, Lauren said.

The facilitator, along with other adult mentors, will encourage this process, giving it guidelines and a framework. They’ll give youth space to put together the nuts and bolts of what they would like to do.

One focus group met in November. “Participants were articulate, self-aware and had a good grasp of the issues,” she said.

Funding is an issue. “During this winter and spring, the project will seek foundation grants in order to have funds to implement the projects the youth identify and want to pursue,” Lauren said.

Idaho for ALL is a group of concerned citizens, not a formal organization, she explained.

Even so, just recently they put up a website: <https://idahoforall.net> as a catalyst to bring groups together to share information about events, protests, educational opportunities, Zoom training opportunities and resources.

“It’s in its early stages, but it’s a start,” she said.

“I have no background in this at all,” Lauren reflected. “I’m a historic preservationist.”

She retired three years ago as an architectural historian.

Lauren grew up in North Spokane.

“My parents were progres-

sive-minded,” she said. “Their Episcopalian faith played a big part, along with their concern for others and for fairness.”

She continues in that tradition and attends St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Coeur d’Alene, which hosts some of Idaho for ALL’s meetings.

“I’m an only child,” she continued. “My parents treated me as an equal partner in the family. It was a shock to come out into the real world. As I went through school, there were two Black families in the entire North Spokane school district.

“My grandmother and her sister traveled in the Southwest, learning about the culture of Native Americans,” she said. “I learned about the things they collected and what they were.”

After Lauren graduated from Mead High School in 1978, she went to the University of Washington where she earned a bachelor of science degree in anthropology in 1982. From there, she received her master of science degree in historic preservation of buildings and structures from the University of Oregon in 1988.

She worked at three state historic preservation offices after college, in Idaho, Washington and North Dakota. Then she found the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, “where I managed their historic preservation program,” Lauren said.

“I worked with inanimate objects and buildings, but there is an element of community preservation concern there as well. I went all over the country assisting Army Corps districts

with their historic building issues. It always involved balancing human passions and problem solving,” she said.

She also has chaired and served on some historic preservation boards.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, she mediated between debris clean-up and historic preservation concerns.

“It was my first time being in diverse, mostly Black neighborhoods, where there was much poverty,” Lauren reflected. “I found it valuable and eye-opening to see parts of the community harmed because of environmental and social injustice. They didn’t want their past just mopped up and swept away.”

Now, as she convenes Idaho for ALL, Lauren said she is “inspired by the people who come and share their skills and experience.

“I take joy in meeting good people to learn from, which gives me energy and expands our connections. I probably receive way more than I give,” she said.

For information, visit the Idaho for ALL website at idahoforall.net.



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Spokane Alliance plans a training for its members

“Wrestling With the Truth of Colonization,” sponsored by Spokane Alliance and Common Good Missoula, is a 10-hour training to educate non-Indigenous members on the history, legacy and impacts of colonization to prepare them for respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples.

It will be held 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Tuesdays, March 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31 in person in Spokane.

Built on the process of truth and reconciliation, participants learn about colonization and ongoing complicity in its legacy.

Follow-up sessions are led by local Indigenous leaders, focusing on opportunities for relationship building and issue areas for collective action.

The sessions with local Indigenous leaders will explore local histories and identify opportunities for action. Participants must attend all five sessions.

“This training series centers the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, the ongoing work in our communities and the emotional labor that accompanies this learning. Participants should be prepared to engage in reflection, dialogue and “heart work,” including small group conversations,” said Edie Rice-Sauer, president of the Spokane Alliance board of directors.

“This is more than a stand-alone training. It is a community organizing initiative. The goal is to carry the learning and reflection

from these sessions into long-term organizing efforts that uphold Native sovereignty and build real solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, so we can work together on shared concerns in meaningful and accountable ways,” said Mary Rupert, chair of the Spokane Alliance truth and transformation team.

The alliance hopes participants will engage with others on the history and ongoing impacts of colonization on the Indigenous people. Attendees will not only learn facts but will also bring their own experiences and ancestry into the process. Break-out groups will offer attendees time to process what they are

learning. Organizers hope his training will move participants from head to heart and leave them in a new place to move forward in hope.

There are only 30 seats for this in-person training for members of the Spokane Alliance.

For information, visit spokanealliance.org.

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Carillonneur uses side of fists to depress the batons to play the tunes

By Molly Ertel

Byrl Cinnamon, carillonneur at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist on Spokane’s lower South Hill, plays the complex, unique instrument called a carillon in the cathedral’s Bishop Cross Tower on Sunday mornings.

The carillon originated in the Low Countries (Netherlands, Belgium and northern France) in the 16th century. There are 200 or so in North America but few in the Pacific Northwest. These keyboard instruments are connected to anywhere from 24 to 77 bells through a series of wires and steel rods. Because they are massive, carillons are generally located in church, government or university towers.

St. John’s carillon has 49 bells, covering four full octaves from low C to high C. “Big John” is the largest bell with the lowest tone and is called a bourdon. It weighs approximately 5,000 pounds, Byrl said.

Seated at the keyboard, the carillonneur depresses the keys, called batons, with the side of his or her fists.

“It’s not a tightly closed fist. It’s halfway closed,” Byrl explained.

He also stressed that the bells don’t move. The system of wires and bars causes the clapper to strike the rim of the bell and produces the ringing sound.

Byrl came to be the carillonneur at St. John’s Cathedral in a roundabout way. Born in northern Oklahoma, he was the middle of three brothers.

“Our mother was musical and majored in voice in college. She taught music in high school and elementary school and started me on piano. We also sang in church choirs as children,” he said.

“I don’t know how my parents came up with my name, but life would have been much simpler had they spelled it B-u-r-l,” Byrl said.

“My last name is from my great-great-grandfather, who came from Ireland in the mid 1800s,” he added. “He came to Canada, spent a year or two there, and then he settled in north central Illinois. When he came, there was a ‘D’ at the end of it, Cinnamon, and that was dropped. It would be more realistic and historical to have that ‘D.’”

His family relocated to the Phoenix area when Byrl was 13. His father, a soil conservationist, took a job with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Byrl attended college at Arizona State University where he received a bachelor’s



Byrl Cinnamon plays carillon at Cathedral of St. John.

degree in church music and a master’s degree in organ performance.

“I’m not a fan of the desert,” Byrl said with a laugh. Post-education, he moved to Pasadena, Calif. “I had wanted to make my living as a church musician, but that never came to be. At some point, I decided that I needed to find something where I could make a decent living. That’s why I went to the Bryan College of court reporting in Los Angeles.”

It takes two to three years to get up to speed as a court reporter. Once Byrl became proficient, he accepted a job in Coeur d’Alene in 1990 with Heston and Associates Reporting. He continued in this line of work for companies in Coeur d’Alene, Portland and Lewiston for more than five years. He then worked for a traveling judge, whose territory encompassed Shoshone, Benewah and Kootenai counties.

Church was always central to Byrl’s life. He was born and raised Methodist and attended the United Methodist Church in Coeur d’Alene. After some time, he became dissatisfied.

“I was looking for a church that had the kind of music that I appreciated, so I came to the cathedral in 2004 and have been here ever since,” he said.

Byrl first participated in the music program at St. John’s by singing in the choir. Over the next two years, his involvement would increase more than he could have imagined. The carillonneur at that time was Andrea McCrady, a physician. She had wanted to play the carillon since undergraduate school, and that desire led her to study in the Netherlands and later in a de-

The next day he contacted the church administrator about having the maintenance person see what he could do about the iced-over door. A few days later Byrl found out the maintenance person had been sick and the dean of the cathedral, Bill Ellis, had gone up and spent an hour or so on it. Despite his efforts, he was unable to get the door open.

“I was embarrassed by the fact that the dean came up,” Byrl recounted.

On another occasion, the cathedral held a Lessons and Carols service for which Byrl had played the carillon. He was on his way back down and remembered that it was dark and cold and the elevator wouldn’t work. Byrl called the maintenance person who “rigged something” to get it to work. Thankful not to be stranded all night, Byrl said of the maintenance man, “He saved my skin on that occasion.”

Rather than talk about his finest moment playing or a favorite piece of music, Byrl referred instead to the services that held the most meaning for him.

One was on Sept. 11, 2011, in honor of those who died in the attack on the Twin Towers 10 years prior. Several dignitaries attended including the then-mayor of Spokane, Mary Verner.

“Other than that, I would play on Christmas Eve. We have three services. I play for half an hour

preceding each one,” he said.

In response to a question about what he would recommend to anyone who aspires to be a carillonneur, Byrl said: “It’s a skill required in very few places in the U.S. and each carillon is different. They can have a different number of bells and a different feel.”

He added, “Getting up to the tower is not easy to do.”

Byrl also wants potential carillonneurs to appreciate that, “It’s different from playing a piano in a recital or even the organ. You’re up there all by yourself.”

While unable to realize his dream of making his living as a church musician, Byrl considers it an honor to be the carillonneur of St. John’s Cathedral for close to two decades. In addition, he still sings in the choir and also plays in the handbell choir.

He said that his faith journey has been through music, and it sustains him to this day.

Worshippers in the sanctuary and neighbors in the area of the cathedral can hear Byrl play on Sunday mornings from 10:15 to 10:30. He said that outdoors on the lawn is the best place to listen to the carillon bells.

The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist is located at 127 E. 12th Ave.

For information, call 838-4277 or visit stjohns-cathedral.org.

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YWCA announces its 2026 awardees

YWCA Spokane announces its nine 2026 Women of Achievement Award honorees, who will be celebrated from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Friday, March 6, at the Davenport Grand Hotel.

These women who have made contributions to the community are being recognized as part of YWCA Spokane’s 44-year history, in which it has honored 300 women for their leadership, vision and dedication that shape Spokane for the better.

Awards merit professional success, deep commitment to giving back and creating lasting impact in the community.

Honorees are selected through a community-driven process, reviewed by a diverse committee of YWCA Spokane board members, volunteers and staff using an impartial scoring system.

Each woman stands out for her transformative influence and alignment with YWCA Spokane’s mission: eliminating racism, empowering

women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

This year’s honorees continue that legacy by giving generously of themselves to ensure Spokane is a stronger, more inclusive place for everyone.

The winners of the 2026 Women of Achievement Awards are:

Anesu Whacha, arts and culture; Becky Rempe, business and industry; Patricia Castaneda, Carl Maxey Racial and Social Justice; Jaime Stacy, community enhancement; Lori Hunt, education; Lisa Gardner, government and public service; Shadan Kapri, science, technology and environment; Autumn Kern, Young Woman of Achievement, and Gloria Aston-Baynes, Lifetime Achievement.

For information, visit ywcaspokane.org/2026-women-of-achievement-honorees and register at ywcaspokane.org/woa.

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Sounding Board Commentary - Sermon of a pastor returning from Minneapolis

Bob Feeney shares in a sermon why he went to Minneapolis

On a “Know Before You Go” call in preparation for my trip to Minneapolis, organizers asked us to answer a question for ourselves and leave it with someone we trust and love. I needed a sermon for Sunday, so I wrote this letter to Westminster United Church of Christ in Spokane, where I am pastor.

The question was: Why am I going to Minneapolis?

Minneapolis is a conflict zone. Thousands of federal agents are on the ground, hundreds of people have been abducted and detained, and Renee Good has been murdered. There is no reason to believe that the situation will improve by the time we arrive.

So...Why am I going to Minneapolis?

This answer came to me more quickly than I could have imagined, and with greater clarity than I almost ever experience. I spoke the words aloud, in my living room alone ... uttering words whose interpretation I did not understand until minutes later.

It will not end with me.

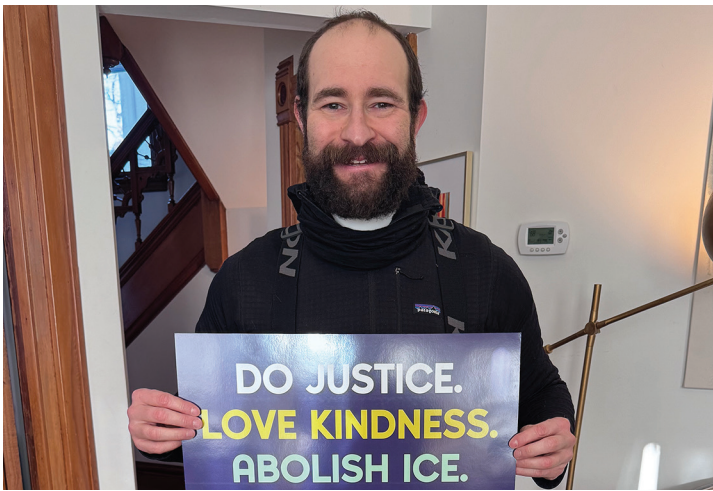
This crackdown is not about immigrants, about queer or trans folks, nor about BIPOC people. It is about fear, and the power some people feel to act out their most hopeless fears on vulnerable people. In Minneapolis, Latin American and Somali communities are being targeted, but at some point, when inflicting terror and pain on these people becomes inefficient or inconvenient enough, they will move on to someone else.

I am a native-born, white, cisgender male citizen, ordained and educated at one of the world’s most prestigious universities. I am afforded a level of privilege and protection that many people cannot dream of in this country. As far-removed as I could feel from the people being terrorized in Minneapolis, I know that if this cruelty continues, it will eventually come for me. I know that if I wait until it reaches me, it will not end with me.

Violence always creates more violence. If I turn my back on this current wave of violence, hoping it will crest and break before reaching me, I know that one day soon it will crash over me, and there may be nobody left to pull me from the undertow.

It will not end with me.

I am committed to peace. Jesus calls us to love God by loving our neighbor, and when my Somali neighbor is under attack, Jesus calls me to bear witness, to refuse to look away, because that is what love commands—and



Pastor Bob Feeney holds a sign he carried in Minneapolis.

Photo courtesy of Bob Feeney

only through bearing witness to the violence can we hope to respond peacefully.

I am going to Minneapolis in peace, knowing I will be met by violent people. I am going because a witness is needed. First, to tell the people of Minnesota that we see them, that the Church sees them through the eyes of Christ, and we will not look away. We will not turn our backs on our neighbors. No matter how difficult it may be, we will see them.

Second, I am going to Minneapolis to tell the people carrying out this violence that I see them—that the Church sees them. I am leaving the relative safety of Westminster and Spokane, people whom I love, to go and tell them they have wandered far from the fold.

They have forgotten their own humanity, and while they are exercising power to take life from their neighbors, they have placed themselves in grave danger. I do not believe in hell, but a wise colleague offered me a nuanced perspective: perhaps there is a hell, but the gates are always open.

So, to those who would be oppressors, to the ones willing to demean and attack the vulnerable, those who would sacrifice tenderness for an illusion of safety and order, I am coming to tell you that you are bound for hell, indeed you are employed as an architect of hell—but the gates have been left open.

I am writing this because I know that you, violent ones, may not hear me, and even if you hear me, hell’s sirens are seductive, and you may choose to respond not with love, but with violence. You may choose to fire your weapon, fashioned in fear.

I know you are fearful of this call, because it is a call to freedom, and freedom is actually quite frightening. Christ does not call us out onto a glassy pond, but out into the swirl and

chop of a wide ocean. I know that many of you will not hear me when I tell you that you are my neighbor, and you are free to leave this place and its fearful ways behind—the gate is open, and we could walk out together into paradise, into the Kingdom of God.

I am writing before I leave the safety and love I feel among friends and neighbors in Spokane because I worry you may not take my invitation to peace and into beloved community.

If my greatest fear is realized, if you will not hear my invitation but remain intent on your fear, I need you to hear these words: It will not end with me.

For more than 2,000 years, Jesus Christ has called us into a witness of peace. For thousands of years before him, prophets and peacemakers spoke the same invitation. Those willing to step boldly have always known that the gates of hell were unlocked and unguarded, open to all willing to walk into something they had imagined but perhaps not fully seen: peace that surpasses understanding.

Many have twisted Christ’s name to serve their agenda, as their leaders do now, but there has always been a remnant giving voice to the voiceless, insisting that peace is our only purpose, and we will not compromise—peace is the only means by which we are going to get there. You will leave when it is no longer cost-effective to be here, but we will keep working for peace, and we will never count the cost.

You have buried and disappeared millions throughout history. Millions more have endured torment and told their story. You seem to never learn that we are seeds, and we will always keep creating more than all you can destroy or bury.

It will not end with me. It will not end with us. It will never end with us.

You have done violence on Dakota lands, and the Dakota are still here, singing their songs. You have done violence on Spokane lands, and still, each day drumming and prayer rise from this place. We will keep singing our songs until you have buried us all, and still our songs will spring up from the earth. From every rubble pile in Gaza, every block in Minneapolis, our songs will continue to rise. Across the Southern deserts where you believe nothing lives or grows, our songs will continue to trace our stories, leaving tracks you will never be able to erase.

It will not end with us.

We will keep singing our songs until the sound is so seductive, even you will be lost in its sway. We will keep on singing until you join in the song and we walk out of that gate together, because that is who we are. We are the ones called by the One who you buried, who rose again to proclaim that it will not end with me.

Church, take heart in these words: It will not end with me. It will not end with us. Keep singing.

After returning, Bob commented: Our lives move through seasons, from life, to the tomb and back into life. That is the Christian story.

In Minneapolis, I saw the death, the tomb, the hell that they are living through right now, and I saw a community connected and strong. I learned about neighborhood “commuters” who drive around tracking ICE agents and alerting their neighbors. I learned that the Dakota people

have been doing this for generations and still do it.

The Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs, a Mohican pastor and environmental activist, noted that in communities that have experienced trauma, it is passed down on a cellular level. It is called epigenetic trauma. He added that if epigenetic trauma is real, then so is epigenetic hope, because all who are alive are descendants of those who survived.

When, on the plane home, I learned of Alex Pretti’s murder, my heart sank.

There is something about the proximity and persistence of the violence that makes it so heavy.

We have to remind ourselves that this is the shape of Christian life. We are drawn back to the tomb again and again. We face death each time, with hope of resurrection.

In Minneapolis, I have seen the brutality, and I have seen the strength of the resistance. I know that what they are doing there, they will try here. It will look different. Our resistance will need to be different, but the same Spirit will guide us, and the same God will go into the streets with us, because Christ’s call into beloved community, into being a neighbor to the world, is irrevocable.

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Editorial Reflections

People of faith must persist in bearing witness, speaking truth

Faith communities rally their resources to unite in prayer and action to meet the spiritual, emotional, physical and justice needs of people in communities, the nation and around the world. Part of their strength is just in gathering people to remind them that they are not alone. Many are motivated by faith to serve, care and act for the wellbeing of their neighbors. Each of us can use our unique skills to have an impact and change the ebb and flow of events. If we are witnesses,

we must bear witness, speak out, call attention to wrongs and challenge those in power to move from their unjust ways. As voices from the World Council of Churches reveal on page 2, we are not alone. Faith leaders across the U.S. and around the world are preaching and teaching the call to put love into action, to act courageously. As our theme for the 2026 Spring Benefit says, “Persist Together: Inspire Miracles,” persisting to resist oppression and hate is essential. We cannot give in

or let up. Even when we think we have made progress, we cannot assume we have instilled love in all folks forever. Changing laws can protect people from harm, but those who hate and suspect other people will seek to undo the laws. Love changes hearts. It does happen, but it’s an effort of faith. Faith requires persistence, as Bob Feeny also shared in his words on page 13: “It will not end with me.” Echoing that idea, the late Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel titled one of her books

of poetry, “Threatened with Resurrection.” She spoke of the inequities of her country in the 1980s where 2 percent controlled 90 percent of the wealth, much like our economy today where the super wealthy seek to keep their influence strong among government leaders and media so they can cling unjustly to their unearned wealth. Is that much different from the Roman Empire or other empires over the ages oppressing and exploiting people? So faiths invite a persistent challenge. **Mary Stamp - editor**



300 attend Spokane prayer vigil in solidarity with 650 in Minneapolis

Opening a Jan. 23 prayer vigil in solidarity with 650 clergy gathered in Minneapolis for prayer and action in the midst of the violence of the Immigrations and Customs Bureau (ICE) in their community, Dean Heather VanDeventer of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John observed that a cathedral is a place people come seeking shelter in times of prayer and in times of violence, calamity and joy. Retired United Church of Christ (UCC) pastor Jim CastroLang then asked, “Why are we here?” He answered that people were gathering because of the volume of cruelty used by ICE in Minnesota where people are dying. **Jim said faith leaders** who went Jan. 22 and 23 to Minnesota included nine from Spokane among 18 from Washington. “Why are we here? Why are you here?” he asked. “We are here because of the violence, cruelty and trauma terrorizing friends in Minneapolis and not leaving Spokane untouched. We have a government using fear to gain power, control and profit. We are here because people are dying and families are being damaged.” Jim said people came to the cathedral to be in solidarity with many good people putting their bodies on the line in Minneapolis. **“We invite you** into two acts: “a prayer vigil and actions on the streets to strengthen our resolve.” The prayer vigil is to “root ourselves in the power of the God of this Love Creation, the Love Force of the universe. We are inextricably linked. We are never alone. We do not act alone. In this great Love, we are united and we remember to ‘not be afraid.’ We redirect anger that wants to hate into anger rooted in Love leading to acts of hope and solidarity.” Jim said that those gathered are rooted in hope and a resolve to not be bystanders but to “go out the doors of this sacred place into the sacred streets to bend the arc of our community toward justice.” He asked: “Are you ready to be the hope that brings change?” Rabbi Tamar Malino of Temple Beth Shalom and Congregation Emanu-El, Holy Names Sister Susan Wells and Karen Stromgren, co-founder of Muslims for Community Action and Support (MCAS), described the situation. **Tamar said:** “Minneapolis is at the center of a crisis long in the making—a crisis of our Constitution, federal overreach, militarized enforcement and the erosion of civil liberties. A crisis of our democracy and our morals.” **Sister Susan said:** “We are in a crisis with faith communities failing to live into a vision of Beloved Community—across traditions, our shared commitments to justice, dignity, compassion, right relationship and collective care.” **Karen said:** “This is not a crisis in one

city. It is a crisis all over the land, born of original sins: stolen land, slavery, genocide and the ongoing violence required to sustain them. As we just marked Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2026, we are standing in an echo of history—offered lessons we need not repeat and legacies of love we are called to build upon.” **Tamar, Susan and Karen said:** “In the tendrils of inherited harm and collective memory, we hear calls from our past—calling us toward both peril and possibility. We listen and respond.” **Tamar then led a prayer:** מִרְצֵם קָרָאב מִתִּיּה מִרְג־יֵכ רִגְה־תָּא תְּבָהָא Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. - Deut. 10:19 “Lest we forget our obligation to those fleeing danger and poverty, and living in a land not our own, this refrain is repeated 37 times in the Torah, the first five books of the shared Christian and Jewish scriptures,” she said. It is the opening of a Jan. 22 statement: “Adding our voices to millions of others across the U.S., leaders of the Reform, Conservative/Masorti, and Reconstructionist Movements of Judaism condemn, in the strongest terms, the [violence] of the Department of Homeland Security...in Minneapolis, and in cities and towns across the nation.” See spokanetbs.org. These organizations represent three-fourths, hundreds of thousands of the U.S. Jewish population, said Tamar, who then read a Prayer for the Protection of Immigrants and Refugees by Rabbi Simkha Weintraub (revised June 2025), expressing concern and fear for immigrants and refugees “who come seeking survival safety and sustenance but are tracked down, rounded up and terrorized by a government” that ignores their cries and chooses “the ruthless power of might over the enduring strength of compassion.” The prayer continues, “Help us stand up for the vulnerable...with commitment, creativity, courage and success... affirming Your Image reflected in each and every soul. “Let the One who creates peace and harmony on high create peace and harmony for us and for all who dwell on earth,” she recited from traditional Jewish liturgy. **Naghmana Sherazi, also of MCAS,** opened by saying, “May the Almighty keep us safe from harm.” She cited several Surahs in the Quran that address oppressors and injustice, offer warnings, comfort the oppressed and promise divine justice. • Surah Ibrahim (14:42) warns not “to be heedless of what the unjust do” and promises they will face “a day of intense terror.” • Surah Al-Buruj (85:10) threatens those who torture and oppress believers with the punishment of Hell. • Surah An-Nisa (4:75) encourages fighting for oppressed men, women and children who cry out to be rescued from

an oppressive, tyrannical community. • Surah Ash-Shura (42:41-42) says while self-defense is allowed, the blame is on those who initiate oppression, tyranny and corruption. • Surah Hud (11:113) advises believers not to support oppressors, lest they be touched by the Fire. • Surah Al-Qasas (28:19) mentions Musa (Moses) referring to a tyrant who seeks to commit oppression on earth. These verses express that while injustice may persist temporarily, divine justice is certain, and oppression of others is condemned. “As a Muslim woman living in today’s world, these verses give me hope that tyranny and oppressors will meet their destined end,” said Naghmana. “We cannot sit and do nothing. Allah promises that he sees everything, knows what is in each person’s heart, so I live in hope. Today, we need hope to be able to continue.” **Jenny Slagle, president** of the Spokane Public Schools Board and a member of the Spokane Tribe, offered “a prayer for our neighbors and our shared humanity.” “Creator, we gather today not because we agree on everything, but because we share a responsibility to one another. We come with concern for families living with fear, for children whose hope is taken away. We hold in prayer Minneapolis—a city under strain, where safety feels fragile and the presence meant to protect deepens harm. We acknowledge that no one is illegal on stolen land. “This truth invites humility. It asks us to remember history honestly. Borders came after displacement. Laws followed removal. Many systems were built without consent from the people who were here since time immemorial. “Let this remembering soften, not harden us. We pray for faith leaders, called to guide people through fear and division, to speak truth with care and choose courage over silence. “We pray for those with authority to exercise power with restraint and no one would lose their humanity in the name of order. “Creator, keep us from silence that pretends to be neutral while harm continues. Root us in solidarity that listens, shows up and insists every person is worthy of dignity, safety and belonging. How we care for those most vulnerable among us is how we decide what kind of ancestors we will become. “May this prayer move our feet, guide our words and shape our choices in the days ahead.” **Ian McPherson, pastor** of Salem Lutheran Church, shared a poem that is a prayer from the German theologian, poet, mystic and activist Dorothee Sölle. As early as 1970, Sölle, who taught in the United States, warned of the rise of what she called Christo-fascism, the perversion

of Christ’s embodied solidarity with the poor and oppressed, the misuse of Jesus’ name, to justify authoritarian violence both at home and abroad. The prayer “Dream me, God” is at presentationsistersne.ie/dream-me-god. **Luc Jasmin,** a first-generation Haitian immigrant who is the representative of the governor in Eastern Washington, said, “Scripture calls us to call one another. Love casts out fear. We need to stand together and let love, not hate, define us.” **Heather VanDeventer prayed** for faith leaders from the region and state, and for faith leaders in Minnesota from across the country. “Today is not the first day to care for neighbors. It is a season we are in,” she said, joining Amy Meredith of Westminster UCC to lead those gathered in singing: “I am not afraid. We are not afraid.” **Bishop Gretchen Rehberg** of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane then pointed out that “theology, biology and statistics tell us that you and I are related. “Every one of us is connected with six degrees of separation. What happens to you and others happens to me. So, we show up when people are oppressed. We speak up when we see injustice—or we stay silent,” she continued. She quoted the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire recently telling clergy to write their wills and then not be afraid to use their bodies to stand up to ICE. “I am thankful that we are here and understand we are all connected and related,” Gretchen said. “We are not to use evil against evil, violence against violence or hate against those who hate. “We need to love and respect others,” she continued. “It’s the only way that evil, violence and hate will lose. To people of all faith traditions, I say we need to live that way of life to change their ways.” **Andy CastroLang,** a retired UCC pastor, then reminded that in the U.S. everyone has constitutional rights and protections, regardless of immigration status. One is the right to film police and immigration officers in a public place without impeding their duties. Sharing information from the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network, she invited people to bear witness, advising to stay at a safe distance, say they are exercising their right to record, step back if an officer comes too close and say that’s what they are doing. Those recording need their cell phones to be passcode protected and need to narrate what they witness, documenting names, badges, uniforms, vests, vehicles, license plates, agencies, language used, violence and physical force. To protect the privacy and safety of anyone being detained, they should not go live on social media. Witnesses may send information to hotline@waisn.org.



Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed
Submit events to development@thefigtree.org by the third Friday
More events in online calendar at thefigtree.org/calendar.html

- Feb 1** • **Solidarity with our Haitian Neighbors**, Jasmin Ministries, First Presbyterian, 318 S. Cedar, 3 to 5:30 p.m.
- Feb 2, 9, 16, 23** • **Conversations on the Crisis of Christian Nationalism**, Episcopal Diocese of Spokane Beloved Community Working Group, Zoom, 6:30 to 7:45 p.m., rickmatters@gmail.com
- Feb 3** • **Spokane Black Voices**, "Art as Activism: Seasons, Cycles, and Finding Your Destiny," Northwest Passages Book Club, The Black Lens, Montvale Event Center, 1019 W. First, 7 p.m., 844-5672, blacklensnews.com
- Feb 3-11** • **Annual Novena for Healing**, Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes, 1115 W. Riverside, 358-4290, spokaneecathedral.com
- Feb 3-20** • **Kelly Packer: Here Living Again Living Here**, Whitworth University Lied Center for Visual Arts, 300 W. Hawthorne, Mon-Fri, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 777-3258, wuart@whitworth.edu
- Feb 3, 10, 17, 24** • **Heartistry: Artistic Wellbeing**, Spark Central, 1214 W. Summit Pkwy, 3 to 5 p.m., 279-0299
- Feb 3, 17** • **Passage Meditation Group**, Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry, 6 to 7:30 p.m., spokanebuddhisttemple.org
- Feb 4** • **Emma**, fundraiser for Communities in Schools of Northeast Washington, Spokane Civic Theatre, 7:30 p.m., livemels.com/cisnew
- Feb 5** • **The Fig Tree Development and Board Meetings**, Benefit 12 p.m., Board 1 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org
- **Native Networking Event** for Native Professionals, Entrepreneurs & Business Owners Night, Elk Soup, River Park Square, The Kress Gallery, 3rd Floor, 808 W. Main, 218 1929, ElkSoupED@gmail.com
- **David Guterson, "Evelyn in Transit,"** Northwest Passages conversation with Jess Walter, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, Gonzaga University Coughlin Theater, 8 p.m., gonzagaperformingarts.eventure.net/events/GTR0205
- Feb 5, 12, 19** • **Solo Aging** with Nancy Ruffner, laypeople, professionals and seniors, Jewish Family Services, Aging and Long Term Care, 1313 N. Atlantic, Ste 3000, 2 to 3:30 p.m., www.sajfs.org
- Feb 5, 12, 19, 26** • **Taizé Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartletts@gonzaga.edu
- Feb 6** • **Hands Off! Medicare and Medicaid**, Eastside Gladiators, PeacefulSidewalk Rally, N. Ash and Wellesley, 3:30 to 4 p.m.
- **Miss Spokane Valley Leadership Orientation**, Spokane Valley Library, 22 Herald, applications due Feb. 28, 922-3299 for a one-on-one meeting,
- **First Friday, Spokane**, Spokane's local artists, 5 to 8 p.m., downtownspokane.org/first-friday
- **First Fridays with Pend Oreille Arts Council**, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., artinsandpoint.org
- **Dueling Pianos for a Purpose**, Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition fundraiser, Ella's Theater, Montvale Event Center, 1019 W. 1st, 5 to 10 p.m., endtheviolencespokane.org
- **Healing Harmonies**: Benefit Concert for Cancer Care NW Foundation, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 7:30 p.m., secure.foxtheaterspokane.org/1296/1524
- Feb 7** • **Sons of Norway 4th Annual Craft and Culture Fair**, Trinity Lutheran, 812 N. 5th, Coeur d'Alene, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., (208) 262-8020, soncda11@gmail.com
- **Mend-It Café**, Spokane Zero Waste, Hillyard Library, 4110 N. Cook, 12 to 3 p.m., spokanezerowaste.org
- **Inland Northwest Bluegrass Music Association** Monthly Music Showcase, Unitarian Universalist Church, 4340 W. Whistalks Way, 4 to 8:30 p.m., spokanebluegrass.org
- **2nd Annual Valentine's Day Baking Class**, fundraiser for Refugee and Immigrant Connections, Spokane Lilac City Bakery, 1215 N. Ruby, 6 to 8 p.m., 209-2384, RICS@ricspokane.org, ricspokane.org
- **Clarion Brass: Off the Charts**, The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, 127 E. 12th, figaro@figarotunes.com, figarotunes.com/clarion
- Feb 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28** • **Afternoon Tea**, Historic Davenport Hotel, 10 S. Post, 1 to 3 p.m., davenporthotelcollection.com
- To Feb 8** • **"Charlotte's Web,"** Spokane Children's Theatre, 2727 N. Madelia, Fri 7 p.m., Sat Sun 2 p.m., 328-4886, spokanechildrenstheatre.org
- Feb 8** • **Spokane String Quartet 3**, Haydn, Bartok, and Schumann, The Fox Theater, 1001 W. Sprague, 624-1200, spokanesymphony.org
- Feb 10** • **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference** Planning Team Review, 1 p.m., Zoom, 535-4112
- **Deadline for Write a Letter to the River**, submit online, by mail or drop at Community Building lobby, Spokane Riverkeeper Valentine's letter, spokaneriverkeeper.org/riverjournal2026/1/16/show-your-love-for-the-spokane-river-join-our-letter-writing-campaign
- Feb 11** • **ED Coffee Hour**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, online, 9 to 10 a.m., nonprofitwa.org
- **I Did The Time Lobby Day** at the State Capitol Day of Empathy, United Churches of Olympia, 110 11th SE, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., idadthetime@gmail.com
- **QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention** Training, Spokane Regional Health District, 1101 W. College, 6:30 to 8 p.m., [srhd.org/events/question-](http://srhd.org/events/question-persuade-refer-qpr-suicide-prevention)

- persuade-refer-qpr-suicide-prevention
- Feb 12** • **Southern Interior Salish Storytelling**, Unitarian Universalist Church, 4340 W. Whistalks, 7 p.m., salishschoolspokane.org.
- Feb 12, 19, 26** • **Tools for Running an Effective Nonprofit**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, online 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., nonprofitwa.org
- Feb 12, 26** • **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 p.m., 818-6733
- Feb 13** • **2026 Healthy Heart Powwow**, The NATIVE Project, Rogers High School, 1622 E. Wellesley, opens 4 p.m., dinner 5 p.m., grand entry 6 p.m., 482-7535, nativeproject.org
- **"Sounds of Himalaya,"** Meditative Sound Experience with Shaamaahs, Shala Living Yoga, 412 W. Boone, 7 p.m., 919-9940, shalalivingyoga@gmail.com
- Feb 14** • **Cinn-A-Gram, Meals on Wheels**, 1222 W. 2nd., 12:01 a.m. to 11:59 p.m., mowspokane.org
- **Spokane's Lunar New Year/Asian Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Business Expo**, Spokane United We Stand, Spokane Convention Center, 334 Spokane Falls Blvd, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 928-9664, spokaneunitedwestand.org
- Feb 14, 15** • **Spokane Public Radio Record Sale**, CenterPlace, 2426 N. Discovery, Spokane Valley, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., spokanepublicradio.org/2025-12-24/donation-guidelines-for-the-2026-record-sale
- Feb 15, 16** • **Keberle Jazz Mass**, St. Mark's Lutheran, 316 E. 24th, Sun 8:30 a.m., Mon 10:45 a.m., stmarks-spokane.org
- Feb 18** • **Ash Wednesday Silent Day of Prayer**, Sr. Mary Eucharista, SMMC, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 6910 S Ben Burr, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net
- **Build Your Caregiver Co-Op Business Workshops**, Inland Cooperative Services, Zoom, 5:30 to 7 p.m., nwcdc.coop
- Feb 18, 25, Mar 4, 11, 18, 25** • **The Build your Caregiver Co-op Business Workshops**, Northwest Cooperative Development Center, Inland Cooperative Services, Zoom, 5:30 to 7 p.m., 360-943-4241, nwcdc.coop
- Feb 19** • **Mardi Bras Party**, Eastside Gladiators, 18203 E. Appleway, 6 to 8 p.m., 891-5203
- Feb 19-Apr 2** • **Strengthening Families program**, for parents, guardians and youth ages 10-14, Cheney High School Library, Th 5:30 to 8 p.m., 703-2802, esd101.net
- Feb 20** • **Rising Tide, A Collaborative Evening of Dance**, Kindling Productions, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., 424-0601, gonzaga.edu/myrtle-woldson-performing-arts-center
- Feb 20-22** • **Collective Awakening Winter Retreat**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 3 p.m. to 3 p.m., collectivelyawake.com
- Feb 21** • **Future Day**, SCC Lair Student Center, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., kspss.org/events
- **Viva Vino Gala**, Nuestras Raices fundraiser, Spokane Tribe Resort & Casino, 14300 US Hwy 2, Airway Heights, 5 p.m., 557-0566, office@raiceswa.org
- Feb 22** • **Mindful Making**, The Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 1 p.m., northwestmuseum.org
- **Clothing Swap**, Spokane Zero Waste & Mend-It Café, North Spokane Public Library, 1 to 4 p.m., spokanezerowaste.org
- **Lunar New Year Celebration**, Spokane Chinese Association, The Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox, cultural fair 1 p.m., performances 4 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org
- **Annual Student Concert Series 2025-2026**: The Journey Within, Holy Names Music Center, 3910 W. Custer, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., 326-9516, hnmc.org
- **Taizé Sunday Evening Hour of Prayer**, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 6910 S. Ben Burr, 5 p.m., 995-0987
- Feb 23-Mar 3** • **"Practicing Catholics-Transformative Spiritual Practices,"** Nine Days of Grace Annual Novena, Fr. Jack Bentz SJ, St. Aloysius, Boone & Astor, M-F 12:15 & 5:30 p.m., Sat 12:15 p.m., 313-5896
- Feb 27** • **Taste of Life**, fundraiser for Hospice of Spokane, Historic Davenport Hotel, program, auctions, music and other entertainment, 5:30 p.m.
- To Feb 28** • **"Here & Now"** exhibit of traditional and contemporary media, Spokane Falls Community College, 3410 W. Whistalks, Mon-Fri 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 533-3710, sfccfinearts.org/gallery
- Feb 28** • **Annual Lutheran Brunch**, Lutheran Community Services Northwest Tri-Cities, Kennewick First Lutheran Church, 10 a.m., lcsnw.org/program/tcbrunch
- **A Timeless Celebration**, Son Dulce Live Salsa, Nuestras Raices Centro Comunitarios, open 6:45 p.m., concert 8 to 10 p.m., sondulce.com
- Mar 1** • **Grief Tending Circle**, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 11507 S. Keeney, 4 to 6:30 p.m., harmonywoods.org
- Mar 5** • **The Fig Tree Development and Board Meetings**, Benefit 12 p.m., Board 1 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org
- Mar 6** • **Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon**, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., ywcaspokane.org
- Mar 10-11** • **Regional Impact Summit**, Idaho Nonprofit Center, Hospice of North Idaho, 2290 W. Prairie Ave., Coeur d'Alene, web.idahononprofits.org/events
- Mar 14, 18** • **The Fig Tree Benefit Lunch**, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Hemmingson Ballroom, Gonzaga, Wed, Breakfast-Time Benefit, 7:30 to 9 a.m., Zoom, 535-4112
- Mar 15-17** • **Innovia Summit**, innovia.org
- Mar 17-19** • **End the Violence Conference**, srdvc.org
- Mar 21** • **PJALS Action Conference**, pjals.org
- Mar 31** • **Spokane River Forum Breakfast**

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Manzanita House welcomes immigrants and refugees in many ways

Manzanita House is named after the manzanita bush that regrows after fires, symbolizing resiliency, and named “house” to say everyone is welcome.

Manzanita House’s motto is “Rooted in Welcome.”

In 2025, the program helped more than 1,400 people, and since it was founded in 2022, it has served people from more than 110 countries.

Manzanita House, which now has 24 employees, finds clients by word of mouth, on social media, through its website and by referrals from other organizations.

Pat Castaneda, the director of Manzanita House, grew up on Margarita Island in the Caribbean off the coast of Venezuela as the youngest of eight children. Her parents encouraged their children to study abroad, so Pat went to study abroad and did not come back.

She studied business management at the University of London, England, from 1997 to 2001 before she moved to Florida, where she organized events and managed apartments for tourists. She then worked 13 years in North Carolina with a nonprofit welcoming Venezuelans to Raleigh.

After moving to Spokane in 2019 with her two daughters, Pat first worked with immigrants and refugees at World Relief.

Then she co-founded Manzanita House with Sam Smith, an immigration attorney who is director of immigrant and legal aid.

Manzanita House’s primary programs are to help people with immigration legal aid and overcoming barriers to settling.

Its legal assistance is free or low-cost—about a third or a fourth of normal rates. They have three attorneys and plan to hire a fourth. They also have three legal advocates—one is Department of Justice accredited.

They also offer free citizenship classes and partner with Northwest Immigration Rights Project to defend clients in removal cases with immigration courts.

To protect clients, they make sure they know that when they sign up for a driver’s license, they should not register to vote until they are a citizen.

“It’s confusing for someone who does not speak English well or know the system. If they register to vote it can be cause for deportation,” Pat said.

Immigration legal aid is their biggest department.

Manzanita House’s other programs focus on empowerment and education. Empowerment means helping clients daily with resource navigation. Educational workshops provide extended cultural orientation and support people in finding jobs.

Their Cultural Engagement and Implementation Program (CEIP) offers cultural compe-



Pat Castaneda leads multi-faceted outreach of welcome.

tency training. People with lived experiences give presentations and sessions to help service providers and agency leaders serve specific immigrant communities better.

The Cultural Engagement Navigation Program offers youth after school activities to supplement what Spokane Public Schools provides with more culturally appropriate options. For example, Manzanita House supported local Afghan youth by sponsoring a free cricket team and youth volleyball with the YMCA.

For youth, Manzanita House has launched a leadership program to invite multicultural student leaders to learn of opportunities for those who study hard. Twenty-five applied for 10 multicultural youth leader openings at Spokane Public Schools.

Another program, Heritage Language Classes, strengthens the relationship of children with their parents by teaching them their heritage language and culture—Arabic, Spanish, Dari/Farsi—so they are proud of their language, know who they are and can communicate with family.

While the children are in class, parents have the option to attend teatimes and *cafesitos*, where they can build relationships, learn new skills, find resources and hear from local business leaders.

Pat said people are scared to attend public activities.

“Our space is safe, and we have good attendance, but we have paused putting on public events,” she said. “2025 was a hard year, and we are cautious about creating public activities.”

Manzanita House, however, invites organizations to come to uplift and empower immigrants and the local community on immigrant rights and how to be good allies.

Pat listed some print and online resources.

- Information on red cards/tarjetas rojas and suggestions on how immigrants and refugees can protect themselves if ICE knocks on the door is at ilrc.org/redcards.

- The Fig Tree Resource Di-

rectory is helpful because it is in print, as well as online.

- Volunteers can help educate the community on the needs of refugees and immigrants.

- People can support by contacting elected officials by phone or emails and giving testimony at local meetings and to state representatives, asking them to protect refugee and immigrant rights.

- Manzanita House has a regularly updated Know Your Rights resource page.

- Its newsletter and social media are regularly updated with resources and opportunities to support immigrants.

Pat also mentioned some bills before the state legislature.

While local officials may feel helpless to challenge ICE, there is a bill before the state legislature to require that ICE agents not wear masks. In addition, the Keep Washington Working Act would allow immigrants to keep working.

Pat noted that it is possible to give remote testimony on SB 5855, concerning the use of face coverings by law enforcement officers, and HB 2105, concerning immigrant worker protections.

For advocacy efforts, resource sharing and mutual support, Manzanita House is a member of the Eastern Washington Refugee Coalition, the Spokane Immigrant Rights Coalition and the Washington Immigration Solidarity Network.

Locally, Pat said work is always needed to improve relationships between the local community and the immigrant and refugee community.

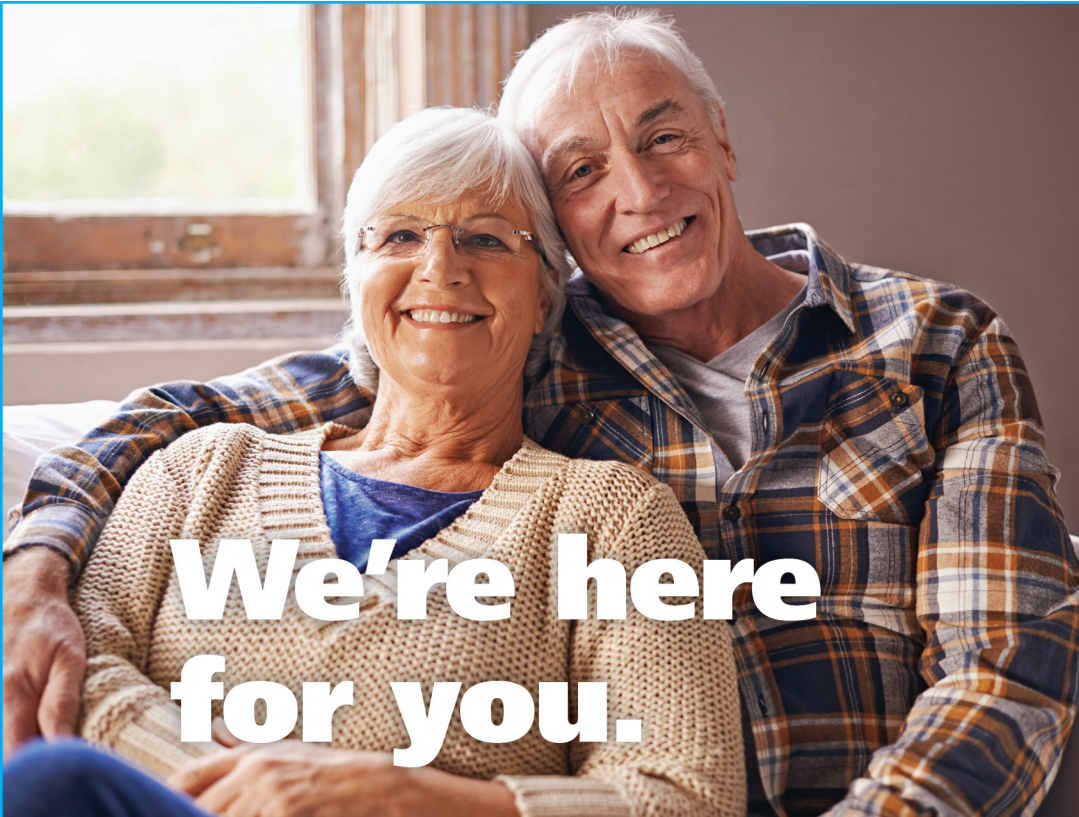
“Although the work is hard, many people are ready to provide support and walk alongside our community,” she said. “It’s hard but rewarding to challenge the animosity and negative impressions some people have of immigrants and refugees.”

“It’s important to keep doing what we do. History shows there is a need to keep educating, empowering and advocating for rights and to make sure people know what immigrants contribute to society. Migration is important for the country,” said Pat, who grew up Catholic and attends St. Ann’s Parish because of its many years of advocacy for immigrants.

Although she does not speak most of the languages of the immigrants they serve, she and staff feel the warmth of their appreciation as they relate with clients to help them meet their needs.

There is continual need to educate the community, Pat said, because animosity often comes from people who lack information and relationships.

For information, visit manzitanitahousespokane.org or their social media [@mhspokane.org](https://twitter.com/mhspokane.org).



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KSPS PBS introduces kids to careers

KSPS PBS’s third annual Future Day from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 21, at the Spokane Community College Lair invites children to explore trades and careers through interactive activities led by local businesses, colleges, nonprofits and community groups.

Last year about 400 came. Kids try activities in engineering,

art, public-safety, healthcare and more. Each activity can be completed in four to seven minutes to introduce many careers and skills.

KSPS PBS partners with businesses and organizations to educate current and new generations on opportunities, also with 160 Career Explore NW videos.

For information, visit kspbs.org/futureday.